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URIEL

AND OTHER POEMS

PERCY MACKAYE

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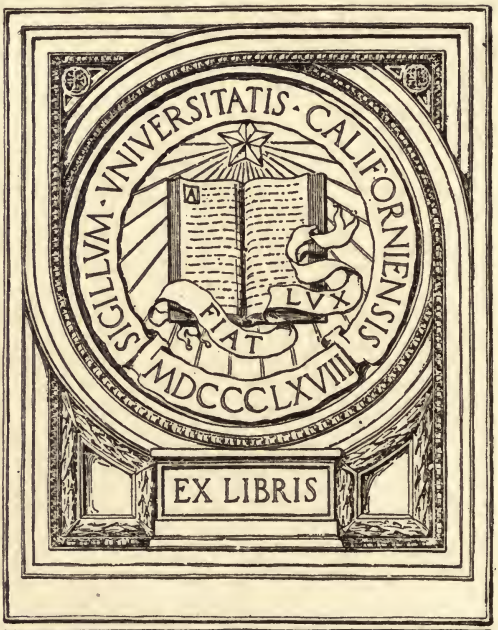

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URIEL

AND OTHER POEMS

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AND OTHER POEMS

BY

PERCY MACKAYE

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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1912

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PS
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TO
THE GRACIOUS LIFE
AND QUICKENING MEMORY
OF MY BROTHER
WILLIAM PAYSON MACKAYE
POET ACTOR ARTIST
1868—1889

"He was a verray parfit gentil knight."

PREFATORY NOTE

For this volume the author has selected, from poems written chiefly during the last two years, such only as are commemorative in their nature. Since most of these are concerned with persons or events of public interest, the following brief references to some of their special occasions are placed here in lieu of footnotes.

Uriel: William Vaughn Moody, poet and dramatist, died October 17, 1910. This poem was written about a year later. Shortly before his death, he told a friend about a new drama, on the theme of Saint Paul, the outlines of which had come to him splendidly as a vision. To this the sixth stanza of *Uriel* refers symbolically.

The Sibyl: In 1912 was published *The Art of the Theatre*, by Edward Gordon Craig. The volume is significant of a new era in the art involved.

The Return of Ellen Terry: Read by the author in the Hudson Theatre, New York, November 3, 1910, upon the return of Miss Terry to America, for her series of Interpretive Readings "The Heroines of Shakespeare."

Peary at the Pole: Read by the author in the Metropolitan Opera House, New York, February 8, 1910, at the National Testimonial to Robert E. Peary, on his return from the North Pole.

To the Fire-Bringer: On the death of the author of *The Fire-Bringer*, the body of the poet was cremated, October, 1910. These verses were written at the time.

The Trees of Harvard: Stanzas read at the Dedication (on Commencement Day, 1912) of a red-oak sapling, chosen by the Harvard Class of Eighteen Ninety-Seven from among those then planted to supersede the dead elms in the College Yard, at Cambridge.

Invocation: Written for a Symposium of tributes by American poets to the memory of Robert Browning, gathered by Mr. William Stanley Braithwaite, and published in the *Boston Transcript*, May 4, 1912.

The Bard of Bouillabaisse: Stanzas written for the Centenary of the birth of Thackeray. Read in the Sixty-Ninth Regiment Armory, New York, January 30, 1912, by Mr. Ben Greet, at the Centenary Festival held by the Southern Industrial Educational Society, at which bouillabaisse — the dish celebrated by Thackeray in his ballad — was served to the public.

The Candle in the Choir: Read by the author in the Congregational meeting-house at Old Rockingham, Vermont, August 4, 1912, on the occasion of the Annual Pilgrimage. The incident narrated is historic.

In the Bohemian Redwoods: Written at San Rio, California, in the Redwood Grove of the Bohemian Club of San Francisco, on the festival of the Thirty-Third Mid-

summer High Jinks and the performance of the Grove Play, August 6, 1910.

Browning to Ben Ezra: Read by the author before the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, at the Robert Browning Centennial Meeting, May 7, 1912.

Ninety-Seven: Read by the author at the Decennial Celebration of the Harvard Class of Eighteen Ninety-Seven, at the Hotel Vendome, Boston, June 24, 1907.

To the Editors of the *North American Review*, *The Mask* (Florence, Italy), the *Century Magazine*, the *Boston Transcript*, *The Outlook*, *Scribner's Magazine*, *The Churchman*, the *Poetry Review* (London), the *Harvard Graduates' Magazine*, the writer makes his acknowledgments in reprinting poems which have appeared in those journals.

Cornish, New Hampshire
October, 1912.

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URIEL

STANZAS TO THE MEMORY OF WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY

I

Uriel, you that in the ageless sun
Sit in the awful silences of light,
Singing of vision hid from human sight,—
Prometheus, beautiful rebellious one!
And you, Deucalion,
For whose blind seed was brought the illuming spark,
Are you not gathered, now his day is done,
Beside the brink of that relentless dark—
The dark where your dear singer's ghost is gone?

II

Imagined beings, who majestic blend
Your forms with beauty!—questing, unconfined,
The mind conceived you, though the quenchèd mind
Goes down in dark where you in dawn ascend.
Our songs can but suspend
The ultimate silence: yet could song aspire
The realms of mortal music to extend
And wake a Sibyl's voice or Seraph's lyre—
How should it tell the dearness of a friend?

III

The simplest is the inexpressible;
The heart of music still evades the Muse,
And arts of men the heart of man suffuse,
And saddest things are made of silence still.
In vain the senses thrill
To give our sorrows glorious relief
In pyre of verse and pageants volatile,
And I, in vain, to speak for him my grief
Whose spirit of fire invokes my waiting will.

IV

To him the best of friendship needs must be
Uttered no more; yet was he so endowed
That Poetry because of him is proud
And he more noble for his poetry,
Wherefore infallibly
I obey the strong compulsion which this verse
Lays on my lips with strange austerity —
Now that his voice is silent — to rehearse
For my own heart how he was dear to me.

V

Not by your gradual sands, elusive Time,
We measure your gray sea, that never rests:
The bleeding hour-glasses in our breasts

Mete with quick pangs the ebbing of our prime,
And drip — like sudden rime
In March, that melts to runnels from a pane
The south breathes on — oblivion of sublime
Crystallizations, and the ruthless wane
Of glittering stars, that scarce had range to climb.

VI

Darkling those constellations of his soul
Glimmered, while racks of stellar lightnings shot
The white, creative meteors of thought
Through that last night, where — clad in cloudy stole —
Beside his ebbing shoal
Of lifeblood, stood Saint Paul, blazing a theme
Of living drama from a fiery scroll
Across his stretchèd vision as in dream —
When Death, with blind dark, blotted out the whole.

VII

And yet not all: though darkly alien
Those uncompleted worlds of work to be
Are waned; still, touched by them, the memory
Gives afterglow; and now that comes again
The mellow season when
Our eyes last met, his kindling currents run
Quickening within me gladness and new ken

Of life, that I have shared his prime with one
Who wrought large-minded for the love of men.

VIII

But not alone to share that large estate
Of work and interchange of communings —
The little human paths to heavenly things
Were also ours: the casual, intimate
Vistas, which consecrate —
With laughter and quick tears — the dusty noon
Of days, and by moist beams irradiate
Our plodding minds with courage, and attune
The fellowship that bites its thumb at fate.

IX

Where art thou now, mine host Guffanti? — where
The iridescence of thy motley troop!
Ah, where the merry, animated group
That snuggled elbows for an extra chair,
When space was none to spare,
To pour the votive Chianti, for a toast
To dramas dark and lyrics debonair,
The while, to *Bella Napoli*, mine host
Exhaled his Parmazan, Parnassan air!

X

Thy Parmazan, immortal laird of ease,
Can never mold, thy caviare is blest,

While still our glowing Uriel greets the rest
Around thy royal board of memories,
Where sit, the salt of these,
He of the laughter of a Hundred Lights,
Blithe Eldorado of high poesies,
And he — of enigmatic, gentle knights
The kindly keen — who sings of *Calverly's*.

XI

Because he never wore his sentient heart
For crows and jays to peck, ofttimes to such
He seemed a silent fellow, who o'ermuch
Held from the general gossip-ground apart,
Or tersely spoke, and tart:
How should they guess what eagle tore, within,
His quick of sympathy for humblest smart
Of human wretchedness, or probed his spleen
Of scorn against the hypocritic mart!

XII

Sometimes insufferable seemed to come
That wrath of sympathy: One windy night,
We watched through squalid panes, forlornly white, —
Amid immense machines' incessant hum —
Frail figures, gaunt and dumb,
Of overlabored girls and children, bowed

Above their slavish toil: "O God! — A bomb,
A bomb!" he cried, "and with one fiery cloud
Expunge the horrible Cæsars of this slum!"

XIII

Another night dreams on the Cornish hills:
Trembling within the low moon's pallid fires,
The tall corn-tassels lift their fragrant spires;
From filmy spheres, a liquid starlight fills —
Like dew of daffodils —
The fragile dark, where multitudinous
The rhythmic, intermittent silence thrills,
Like song, the valleys. — "Hark!" he murmurs, "Thus
May bards from crickets learn their canticles!"

XIV

Now Morning, not less lavish of her sweets,
Leads us along the woodpaths — in whose hush
The quivering alchemy of the pure thrush
Cools from above the balsam-dripping heats —
To find, in green retreats,
'Mid men of clay, the great, quick-hearted man
Whose subtle art our human age secretes,
Or him whose brush, tinct with cerulean,
Blooms with soft castle-towers and cloud-capped fleets.

XV

Still to the sorcery of August skies
In frillèd crimson flaunt the hollyhocks,
Where, lithely poised along the garden walks,
His little maid enamoured blithe outvies
The dipping butterflies
In motion — ah, in grace how grown the while,
Since he was wont to render to her eyes
His knightly court, or touch with flitting smile
Her father's heart by his true flatteries!

XVI

But summer's golden pastures boast no trail
So splendid as our fretted snowshoes blaze
Where, sharp across the amethystine ways,
Iron Ascutney looms in azure mail,
And, like a frozen grail,
The frore sun sets, intolerably fair;
Mute, in our homebound snow-tracks, we exhale
The silvery cold, and soon — where bright logs flare —
Talk the long indoor hours, till embers fail.

XVII

Ah, with the smoke what smouldering desires
Waft to the starlight up the swirling flue! —
Thoughts that may never, as the swallows do,

Nest circling homeward to their native fires!
Ardors the soul suspires
The extinct stars drink with the dreamer's breath;
The morning-song of Eden's early choirs
Grows dim with Adam; close at the ear of death
Relentless angels tune our earthly lyres!

XVIII

Let it be so: More sweet it is to be
A listener of love's ephemeral song,
And live with beauty though it be not long,
And die enamoured of eternity,
Though in the apogee
Of time there sit no individual
Godhead of life, than to reject the plea
Of passionate beauty: loveliness is all,
And love is more divine than memory;

XIX

And love of beauty is the abiding part
Of friendship: by its hallowed beams we char
Away all dead and gross familiar
Disguise, and lay revealed truth's living heart—
The spirit's counterpart,
Which was in him a flaming Uriel
Obscured by chaining flesh, but freed by art

And by the handclasp that his friends knew well,
To make from time the imprisoned splendors start.

XX

The splendors start again from common things
At thought of quiet hours of fellowship,
When his shy fancy, like an elfin ship,
On foam of pipe-smoke spread elusive wings,
While subdued carollings
Of viewless fervors followed in her wake,
Till, with swift tack and rhythmic sweep of strings,
She flew before his darkening thought, and strake
On reefs that rolled with solemn thunderings.

XXI

The simple and the mighty themes, that keep
Friendship robust and taut the mental tether,
Of these we talked in casual ways together,
Delighting in the shallow and the deep:
Nature, quick or asleep,
And poetry, the fool's anathema,
Plays, and the magic house where passions weep
Or laugh at their own image, America
Our gallant country, and her captainship.

XXII

But special-privileged investitures
Of beauty liked him not. To him the fact

Was by its passion only made compact
Of beauty; as, amid the Gloucester moors,
The loveliness, which lures
The artist's eye, for him was nature's prism
To illume his love of country: art which endures
At once is poetry and patriotism,
In spite of jingoists and epicures.

XXIII

So, since his soul contemned thoughts which suborn
Glory from theft, where he stood, unafraid,
"Before the solemn bronze Saint-Gaudens made,"
It was his consecration to be torn
Between swift grief and scorn
For the island pillage of our Myrmidons,
And there alone, alone of the high born,
He spoke, as the great sculptor spoke in bronze,
From love, whose worth can never be outworn.

XXIV

Long may we heed his voice, though he be mute
As the wan stars to instigate us more!
Long shall we need his voice, in the gross war
Of civic pillagers whose hands pollute
Our country, and confute
The oaths of freedom! Long his passionate art

Let serve the people's temple, to transmute
The impotence of artists, and impart
Strength to the fair, joy to the resolute!

XXV

The joy of that large faith American
In the high will which turns the human tide
He blazed across the sun-crowned Great Divide
To make in art a new meridian,
Stretching the puny span
Of our pent theatre's roof, to arch a flood
Of mightier passion cosmopolitan
And build, in nobler urgings of our blood,
The excellent democracy of man.

XXVI

Nor less he probed the covert cosmical
Yearnings which glorify the spirit's sleep,
Where dumb Michaelis, 'mid his grazing sheep,
Stared on the awful Presence Spiritual,
And heard the mystic call
Of the clear Christ across the desert waste
Lifting from life and death the numbing pall,
Subtly for all the anguished and disgraced
Cleansing the mind with breath medicinal.

XXVII

These were the virile omens of his prime
(Unmellowed still, he deemed them, but enough
To give his ardor tang for lordlier stuff),
But these, when from the clear noon of his clime
He sank — to solemn chime
Of stars — in twilight down, the petty grigs
That pipe around the marshes of the mime,
Parched niggards of negation, rasped with jigs
Of glee — to perish in the frost of time.

XXVIII

To her who, 'mid his starry litany,
Muffled their niggling jargon from his ears
For quiet music of familiar spheres,
Soothing the dark inevitability
With springs of courage, be
Her own strong soul her sentinel: the flame
That leaps in praise dies in my monody.
Beauty with service hallows her own fame:
A living greatness asks no elegy. —

XXIX

Uriel, you of light and vision guard!
Uriel, *you* who with his fiery being
Are blended in my vision's far foreseeing,

That by one name I hail you — friend and bard!
Our battling age is starred
With portents of your presence, till the years,
Urged by your voice, besiege time's evil-scarred
Ruin with sounds of singing pioneers,
Whose onward wills, like wings that slip the shard,

XXX

Sweep to the future! What the mind adores
The will of man shall conquer: what his fate
Denies, his courage still shall consummate!
And as Imagination, rising, soars —
Scattering her viewless spores
Of beauty on the tempest — Uriel,
You gaze with her where the blind gloaming roars,
Or murmur, where she sits, with fervent shell,
Rapt in the solitudes of fiery shores.

THE SIBYL

TO EDWARD GORDON CRAIG
UPON THE PUBLICATION OF HIS VOLUME
"ON THE ART OF THE THEATRE"

Cloudy, vast, the caverned stage
Glows with twilight — Where are they:
Ribald love, and conscious rage,
Joyless banter, captious quibble,
Brass and bauble of Broadway?
What are such to her — the Sibyl,
Where she dreams beside her solemn
Single column
In the quiet? —
Bats in swoon,
Gnats in riot,
Midgets swarming 'gainst the moon:
Such are they
Beneath the grace
And the rapture of her face.

She will waken. Long she's slumbered
Through the noisy years unnumbered,
Since her radiant limbs withdrew —

Swift, adept,
Divinely calm —
From the leering satyrs' view
To the visioned silences
Where she slept,
Pillowed in her bended arm
On the starred Acropolis.

She has wakened! She has smiled
With a tender, large delight
At the spell-charms of her child,
Her own spirit's acolyte.
At his wand-touch she has risen
In the mind of man — her prison
And her temple. Lo, *she moves!*
Sensuous, with form of fable,
Most divinely reasonable,
Not the comets through the ether,
Not the planets in their grooves
Tread a more harmonious measure
Than she paces, in her pleasure,
On the silences beneath her.

For the silences are thrumming
As with heart beats at her coming,
And the Passions pause aghast

At the glorious decision
Of her movements, as they mark
Wild *vivaces* of her vision,
Deep *andantes* of her dark;
And her gestures — as she lifts
Pillared vistas of the past,
Spacious visions of the marches
Of To-morrow, gracious arches
Through whose rifts
Beauty beckons — hold no mirror
To the error
And the grossness of the age,
Mimic not
Whims and gropings of emotion,
Atrophies and tricks of thought,
But her rapture is the rage
Of man's spirit in its fullness
Purged of accident and dullness;
And her music, born of motion,
Recreates the spirit's trance,
Weaving symphonies of sunlight,
Waking chorals from the wan light
Of the Pleiads in their dance.

Through her cloudy, caverned stage
Bursts the morning: And she stands

In the quiet, by her solemn
Shining column,
Gazing forth, serenely glad,
On the roaring dazzled lands,
Where the little children, clad
In the garments of her spirit,
On enchanted feet come streaming,
For she knows they shall inherit
All the ages of her dreaming.

Then the sated ones and blinded,
And the timid, callous minded,
Clutch the children's sleeves, and stare,
Crying: "What behold you there?
There is nothing!" But the lover,
And the young of soul, his friend,
And the artist, follow after
The children in their laughter,
And the daring half discover,
And the happy comprehend.

THE RETURN OF ELLEN TERRY

How shall we welcome back her image bright
Who from our hearts has never been away?
They never lived who never loved to play,
Nor ever loved who loved not in delight.
Therefore to her who, in Dull Care's despite,
Long since has taught the world's sad soul to pray
To saints of joy, we bring an homage gay
Of hearts made lighter by her own pure light.

Juliet of love, Miranda of the mind,
Katherine of quips, and beauty's Rosalind,
Truth's Portia, Beatrice the madcap-merry,
All heroines wrought of the master's heart—
To these we bow, and these bow down to Art,
And Art to Time, and Time — to Ellen Terry.

PEARY AT THE POLE

I

Divinely curious
  Child of the stars is man;
And the wonder that beckons us
  Is a child's, since the world began:
For the fire that keeps us purged and free
From the sloth of the beast and his sluggardy
Is kindled of curiosity.

II

Beckoned the polar star —
  And the world child wandered forth:
The aurora blazed afar
  Onward in to the north;
And the awful lure, enticing us
Long ere the tales of Tacitus,
Wrought with a splendor ruinous.

III

The Arctic ages dashed
  Spindrift on wreck and spar,
Till a Yankee viking lashed
  His prow to the ominous star;

And, blent with breed of the States, he manned
His ship with the sinew and the sand
And the sea-glad soul of Newfoundland.

IV

Freighted were cabin and hold
With pemmican, sea-gear and pelt:
Skyward the loud cheers rolled,
Seaward — the *Roosevelt*,
And northward beyond Manhattan Bay
They sank to the silences far away
In the sunlit night and the star-strewn day.

V

O silence is a thing
More beautiful than song
When the paths of the silent ring
With the valor of the strong:
O silent the cliffs of blood-bright snow,
The boreal flush, the emerald floe,
Where they sailed — the earls of the Esquimaux!

VI

Forth from the glacial coasts
They strode with their dogs and furs,
And their shadows were the ghosts
Of old adventurers;

For the barrowed dead rose numb from the night
And followed their path by the igloo's light
Through storm and the smothering infinite.

VII

Silent, and one by one,
  Southward the forms turned back,
But one, who walked alone,
  Held still his starry track,
Till the vast sun circled the ocean's sill,
And the luring star in the void stood still,
And the mind of man had wrought his will.

VIII

From the Arctic's blindfold eye,
  From the iris of the world,
He tore the mystery
  Where a planet's dream lay furled;
And the planet's vision and his were one,
For the doer had dreamed and the dreamer had done
What the wondering world-child had begun.

IX

How may the singer reveal
  Truth from the toiler wrung?
Or how shall the sinew of steel
  And the heart of gold be sung?

Who saith unto Cæsar: *He conquered: He saw?*
Weak, weak is word-tribute; yet mighty is awe
That renders its homage, where truth is law.

x

To Peary of the Pole
  To the vigilant and wary
Undeviating soul,
  Viking and visionary —
Hail, in honor's meridian:
Hail, and honor American
To the triumph of manhood and a man!

TO THE FIRE-BRINGER

(WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY)

Bringer of fire
Down from the star
Quivering far
In quiet eternal:
Bringer of fire! —
Ashes we are
If to thy pyre
Out of our hearts
Ashes we bring.

Vernal, vernal,
Divine and burning —
A wreath of worlds
And wings — was thy vision:
Fadeless now,
That fiery wreath
Wrought of thy yearning
We lay in death
Bright on thy brow.

Singer and lover,
Brother and friend,
Ashes can end
Only the dróss of thee:
Quick, Promethéan,
Out of the dirge
And the dark loss of thee,
Leaps thy star-wrestling
Spirit in pæan!

Fire, fire,
Fire was thy bringing,
An urn elemental
Of burning song
So on thy pyre
We leave it flaming—
Where Death cannot follow—
Toward thee, who camest singing:
"Apollo, Apollo!"

THE TREES OF HARVARD

I

Religion is the shadow of a tree
  Cast by a star upon the soul of man
Tingeing its substance with solemnity,
  For under mystic boughs the soul began
  Its progress from the primal Caliban
Toward reason, and the beauty yet to be.
Therefore perchance it is
  That in trees we treasure
Our own tranquillities,
  Making them the measure
Of our own growth — our griefs and ecstasies.

II

Dear stricken elms of Harvard, while even thus
  Now with your wounds we bleed, still, still it seems
Your vanished verdure — multitudinous
  With twinkling dryads of our boyish dreams,
  With orioles of song, and golden gleams
Of youth — abides, a quickening part of us:

Abides, as though it would
By some spell enchanted
Disperse this tragic mood,
By your fate implanted,
To share with you a secret brotherhood.

III

Your branches die, but not the dreams they bred:
They, like immortal choirs of dawn, displace
Your silent ruin with the singing dead.
Still in your shadowed walks, with shadowy pace,
The Concord poet lifts his star-pale face,
The Elmwood statesman holds his lyric tread.
Still through your silences
Float the far Hosannas
Of that undaunted press,
Brave with tattered banners,
Filing from Lexington to the Wilderness.

IV

Yes, dreams abide; yet fungus will infect
The living tissue and the limb will fall:
Alike in soaring elm and intellect
The cankering worm will bore, and spin the pall
Of aspiration; yet if this were all
Our world of dreams had long ago been wrecked.

It is not all: for growth,
  Plying deep substitution,
Outwears decay and sloth,
  While, with sure revolution,
Youth conquers age, and life o'erlords them both.

V

Then life, give way for life! Old elms forlorn,
  The scion oaks supplant you, and you die;
Shorn are your locks of golden days — all shorn
  (Save in our dreams) of glory — so, good-bye!
  But hail, strong-limbed in young integrity,
Hail, glory of our Harvard boys unborn!
Death is a churlish thing;
  Life, life alone is royal!
Red oak, red oak, we bring
  Hearts alive, hearts loyal:
The king is dead: Long live our crimson king!

INVOCATION

ROBERT BROWNING: 7 MAY 1912

I

Poet of the vast potential,
Curious-minded, quintessential
Prober of passion, ample-hearted
Lover of lovers, virile-arted
Robert Browning, plotter of plays,
Leaven us in these latter days!

Now in rebirth,
Renewing time's festa,
Spring — the wild quester —
Quickens the earth.

II

Not mere being, but becoming
Makes us vital. Stript from numbing
Vestiture of self-complacence
Naked for our soul's renascence,
Robert Browning, riddler of hearts,
Pierce us with your singing darts!

Sharp through the sod,
Flower-tipped for His aiming,
Shoot now the flaming
Spear-heads of God.

III

Not our prayer-stool, but our passion
Makes us holy. Thus to fashion
Psalm and *Credo* to a human
Ritual of Man and Woman,
Robert Browning, purger of souls,
Heap on us your passion-coals!

So let aspire —
As now this young season —
Spirit and reason
In flower and fire!

THE BARD OF BOUILLABAISSE

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY 18 JULY 1911

I

Old guests are gone; old friends have faltered —
  Passed to forgetfulness or fame;
Time's little inn remains unaltered,
  The bill of fare is still the same;
And still within his cherished corner
  He keeps his "old, accustomed place" —
Our brother, cynic, lover, scorner,
  Beloved bard of *Bouillabaisse.*

II

The grizzled face has grown no older;
  A hundred years, they bring no scars,
Pensive, he turns his shadowy shoulder
  To snuff the candles — of the stars,
Where generations, eager hearted,
  Throng newly round his storied chair,
And Monsieur Terré, long departed,
  Leaves in his stead — Madame la Terre.

III

Madame la Terre plays now the hostess
And decks his place for holiday,
Where his imperishable ghost is
The guest to whom she bears her tray.
That he may friendly smile upon her,
She curtsies to the shadowed face:
What may she serve to do him honor?
Behold — a bowl of *Bouillabaisse!*

IV

"A hotchpotch of all sorts of fishes,"
(Such is his ballad recipe:)
"This *Bouillabaisse* a noble dish is:"
Hotchpotch of *all* sorts — such as we!
Souls with the garlic and the pepper,
A sort of savory broth or paste
Of lover, liar, hero, leper:
He taught us — for *ourselves* the taste!

V

For lo, now, to his festa who comes! —
Where Beatrix shines down the stair
Through crowded Crawleys, Esmonds, Newcomes,
While Becky, purring in her lair,

Sits tangling the besotted Sedley
To bumptious Gumbo's black grimace —
A mordant, brilliant, bubbling medley
To mix his bowl of *Bouillabaisse!*

VI

His recipe remains the human:
Hotchpotch of passions, pruderies,
Lusts, raptures, loves of man and woman,
Old vanity of vanities
Redeemed in visions of the poet
Who learns from anguish all his arts:
His bowl, Madame la Terre, bestow it!
The bowl is brimming — with our hearts.

THE AUTOMOBILE

A FIRST RIDE — 1904

Fluid the world flowed under us: the hills
  Billow on billow of umbrageous green
  Heaved us, aghast, to fresh horizons, seen
One rapturous instant, blind with flash of rills
And silver-rising storms and dewy stills
  Of dripping boulders, till the dim ravine
  Drowned us again in leafage, whose serene
Coverts grew loud with our tumultuous wills.

Then all of Nature's old amazement seemed
  Sudden to ask us: "Is this also Man?
  This plunging, volant land-amphibian
What Plato mused and Paracelsus dreamed?
  Reply!" And piercing us with ancient scan,
The shrill, primeval hawk gazed down — and screamed.

THE CANDLE IN THE CHOIR

I

In Rockingham upon the hill
The meeting-house shines lone and still:
A bare, star-cleaving gable-peak,
Broad roofbeamed, snow-ribbed, stark and bleak,
As long ago their needs sufficed
Who came from cottage fires to Christ,
    Sharing with frosty breath
    Their foot-stoves and their faith.

II

In Rockingham above the hill
The stars are few, the winds are shrill;
And pale as little clouds, the prayers
Pulse upward round the pulpit stairs,
Where silent deacons upright sit
Among the gusty shadows, that flit
    From hands upholding higher
    Faint candles in the choir.

III

Seven candles make a shining dim
To mark the psalm and find the hymn;

Seven candles from the choir-rail throw
Their blessing on the pews below;
Seven candles make a glimmering heaven
Of righteousness, but one of seven
Shines in the hand of her:
Elvira Pulsifer.

IV

High on its place of holy fire
The towered pulpit fronts the choir,
From whence the pastor's hand may strow
The penfolds of his flock below,
Or sign, from under level brows,
Toward them — the seven of his house
Who sing with one accord
The service of the Lord.

V

Gaunt looms the shepherd in his gown:
"O Lord, Lord God, who lookest down
Serene from Sinai's dazzling height
On deeps of everlasting night —
Deeps where Thy scorching ire hath streamed
Like lava on the unredeemed —
Be merciful to her,
Elvira Pulsifer!

VI

" Thou art our Father, Lord, Lord God!
And they who kiss Thy shining rod
And break Thy bread and keep Thy tryst—
They walk this bitter world with Christ;
All else with dire Apollyon dwell. —
O save her tender soul from Hell,
And with Thy Pity stir
Elvira Pulsifer!

VII

" Brethren, the thirty-second psalm!
And let your solemn voices calm
The secret fiend from his intent,
And make a virgin heart repent! " —
Thin from the dark the pitch-pipe sounds
Its note, faint stir the crisping gowns,
While the dim shepherd there
Creaks down the frosty stair.

VIII

A shrilling sweet of childish throats,
With sombre bass of elders, floats
Around him through the raftered room,
And elvish from the outer gloom

Seven candles on the little panes
Sway to the choir's subdued refrains,
As down the aisleway floor
He seeks the entry door.

IX

More faintly now, as if more far,
He hears them through the door ajar,
While from the entry, climbing soft,
He flurries to the choir loft:
Here to a darkling privacy
He beckons — so her glance may see —
God's errant worshipper:
Elvira Pulsifer.

X

Candle and hymnal in her hands,
She comes to where the shepherd stands —
Her shepherd who hath labored sore,
With venerable neighbors more,
To lead her spirit to the fold
Where all her kinsfolk came of old:
All them she loved full well,
But not — their fear of hell.

XI

Anxious they whisper in the aisle
(The shrilling voices swoon the while

And boom like cymbals in her ears):
"Our Lord and Father, child, He hears
The cry of sin's repentant heart;
O obdurate, walk not apart
With one who darkens all,
But come to Christ His call."

XII

"Our Lord He is our Father, yes,
And He hath come in tenderness
To me, in hours both bright and dim.
There is no one at all but Him;
And so I cannot walk apart
Nor cry with a repentant heart,
Nor heed another's call,
For God is good to all.

XIII

"His wrath it is eternal, child.
Who fear it not they are defiled.
They may not sit in choir or pew,
Defiant, with His chosen few.
The hymn is ended, now return:
But nevermore His light to spurn!"
Dark, dark, she turns about:
Her candle — he hath blown out.

XIV

O elvish from the outer gloom
Six little flames they leer and loom,
And elvish on the frosty panes
Six candles mock the choir's refrains.
But one all dark, by inward grace
Shines on unseen, and lights the face
    Of Christ His worshipper:
    Elvira Pulsifer.

IN THE BOHEMIAN REDWOODS

Silent above, with seraph eyes
  That peer amid the fronded spars,
More intimate, more friendly wise,
  More tender glow the eternal stars.

Lyric beneath, with echoing blast
  Of fellowship Arcadian,
More cosmic-strange, more pagan-vast,
  More stellar glow the hearts of Man.

Oracular, aboriginal
  Beyond our dreams, the psychic trees
Conspire their awful ritual
  Of sempiternal silences;

Till solemn now, with lunar state,
  The Druid drama slowly dawns,
Where cowlèd satyrs consecrate
  A monastery — of the fauns.

Lit by dance and starry scroll,
  Aloof, familiar, lone, divine
With Delphic laughter of the soul,
  The temples of To-morrow shine!

BROWNING TO BEN EZRA

A CENTENARY SOLILOQUY

I

A hundred years! — Hardly I understand:
Unriddle it, Rabbi. Through the Abbey stones
Hearken — the hushed and reverent monotones,
The shuffled feet, that pause! 'Here lie his bones,
Who passed away
From earth, perhaps to heaven,
Aged seventy-seven;
Born on this self-same day,
The seventh May,
A century gone.' — Look, Rabbi: In my hand
I hold this little watch they call their world,
Open it with my thumb, where lo! each cog,
Each golden wheel, on star-gemmed axis whirled,
Pulses with delicate action. — Pray you, jog
My laggard mind once more! — They state, you say,
This was my time-piece: on this crystal face
I 'd pore, and through dim introspections trace
The portent of the tickings underneath,
The mainspring of the action. May be so,
For you should know, Ben Ezra. All I know

Is, that the ticks grew fainter, as it slipped
Under my pillow. Then I fell asleep,
And have been busy dreaming. That was *death*,
They say, — death. Sudden the quick hair-spring skipped
A turn, trembled, and stopped short. — Much too deep
For me! — Somehow I don't conceive the soul
Like to a watch unwound. Yet now, they say,
I am a poet who has passed away,
With many common millions, to a goal
Unkenned. — Here 's Limbo, then: and I, a shade,
Soliloquize now, in this cloistral corner,
Among pale forms of other ghosts forlorner,
With you, Ben Ezra, whom alive I made
The Rabbi of my rhyme. — A quaint conceit!
Suppose we grant it. So, then! Let us sit
On dust of kings and make a rhyme of it
Together — one dead poet and one rabbi
Conceived and born of him. While you keep tab, I
Will muse the elegy, and score our text:
R. Browning to Ben Ezra, adding next:
Suggested by the former's centenary,
And after that — lest precious ears be vext —
Apologies for defunct vocabulary.

II

The question I would stress, then, — pray allow —
Is this: To pass away, is it to cease?

But if so, *how* to cease? I said just now
That, since my pillow muffled this time-piece,
I have been busy dreaming. Ha, those dreams!
In what frail shallops, what austere triremes,
Unchartered cruisers, barks adventuresome,
I have put forth on unimagined seas
And sailed — with what courageous companies!
Nay, on no phantom ships! no guest needs fear
A skinny-handed, ancient mariner
In me. I entertain with dice of doom
No spectral crews. My fellow-voyagers were —
And are, and shall be still — rich-blooded men,
Rare-hearted women, lovers of this life
And wrestlers with it, reckless of the strain.
My visionary barks, those be my books,
And I, whose bones consort here with the spooks,
Am admiral there of dreamy argosies,
That ply 'twixt earth and heaven their perilous merchandise.

Perilous, yes; for dreams are perilous craft,
When they be manned by fierce doubts, fore and aft,
Whose mutinous foreheads scan the heaven for signs,
And menace their commander: 'You, who planned
Our questing voyage, show us the land — your land
Of God, His promise! All the lone sea-lines

Are dim with setting stars, and stark with death;
Yet you, who hold the rudder, answer *Faith!*
And, once more, only *Faith!*' Thus curse my crews!
I share their hearts but overmaster them,
And hold the rudder straight;
Till now — a star above each plumèd stem —
Lo, where my galleons, guided by their Muse,
The surging planet circumnavigate, —
Doubt kindling nobler doubt, faith quelling fate,
Forms flung to revolution, creeds to rack,
Old cities of dead empires put to sack,
Love founding lordlier kingdoms in the future's track!

So, Rabbi, to our question, if you please:
Is sailing thus — to cease?
The ghosts demur;
For, in the nudging vault, I hear one say:
'Browning, the poet, who has passed away,
This is his sepulchre.'

III

Once a dawn-shaft from God's quiver
Struck my soul, and from its embers
Flashed a star of song forever.
Then the dawn passed. — Who remembers?

Not remember Pippa? — Pippa who, at sun-up,
Rose in her bare attic, while the east boiled gold!
With her rising, see, the morning roses run up
Clambering live and warm, concealing the night-mold. —

Pippa, she who sang till little Asolo
Widened out its walls — like arms, that reach in pity
To nestle lonely things, that yearn for love — till, lo,
Vines of Asolo enwall the heavenly city!

Pippa she was Luigi, Ottima was Pippa,
Mighty Monsignor, chafer, bee and weevil:
Life redeemed from listlessness, innocence from evil,
Like the cinder-girl that wore the crystal slipper.

Well, well, Rabbi, so
Now, as long ago,
Even thoughts of Pippa
Lilt another music, breathe an afterglow.
What, then! Will they say
She, that passed in song, she too has passed away?

Trust me: as I used to sit and ponder,
Songs, songs, songs she sang me, winged of wonder,
Flitting sunward, till they quite forsook —
Like happy birds from open pages —
My black-barred pages.

But shyly three and four, with slantwise wing,
Dartled from heaven back, and hovering
Around my head,
Sung my dear earth instead,
Then nested down, beaks spilling, in my book,
Splashing its margin with God's meadow-dew. —
How cage and heart clapped to!
When lo, all lamely, came a scant-winged few
That fluttered, just outside the closing covers,
Too late to slip between, and lingered nigh,
Teasing with matin-tunes the twilit memory.
Listen! — There pipes one, now! Hark, while it hovers!

On passion's flower
I poised for an hour,
A little hour long,
Ere I passed in song.

Stay! cried my lover
Forsaken: *Faded*
Are love's endeavor
And all that made it!
Dead — dead!

But far overhead
Where faint stars hung,
And low o'er the grass

By the eddying river,
Where poising moon-moths flickered and
swung,
I called to my lover
Over and over:

I poise, I poise, I poise forever,
Because I pass.

IV

To poise — to pass away!
Rabbi, beyond the high groins, rose and gray,
Dimmed by the Minster's adumbrated day,
How, browed in silence, broods my Centenary,
In silence, bred of dust
And the dank charnel's must,
That wraps these bones! — Yes, *he* is passed away
Forever more; nor London's warping mist,
Nor Italy's keen amethyst
Shall cast his shadow among men; and soon
No lingering friend to care, nor old contemporary. —

He, I mean, whom once they pointed at
In Rome and Florence: poet-putterer
Among old pictures,
Uncouth utterer
Of obscure strictures,

Styleless stutterer
(Quoth his critics,
Itching with their own enclitics),—
Paracelsus! — how he sat
In chilblain halls, Del Sarto-dippy,
Robbia-mad, or Lippo Lippi-,
Like some mage of alchemy,
Grinding, in his cracked brain-crucible,
Tortuous rhymes from radiant Titians,
Delving for the thence-deducible
Dialogue-soliloquy:
Not to mention those musicians!
Through the dilettantes' drawl
At the countess' musicale,
What surmise you, English ogler,
Of visions dreamed by old Abt Vogler,
When you stare (nor note his frowning,
Conscious of your own silk gowning)
And pour at tea for Mr. Browning?
Dust to dust: the large, the little,
Ashes both! Who cares a tittle,
At the teas of Goethe, Horace,
Who wore satin, or who wore lace?
Ashes all! even such as — Wait!

What of *him* — even him, the speaker,
Whose spirit, invoked, comes muffled through this weaker

Organ of an alien poet,
Pale, yet not all impassionate,
Sounding subconscious chords that flood and overflow it, —
Of him, *my* spirit, Rabbi, — what of him,
My poising soul? Ah, since I died
How has this soul of mine been multiplied
By minds made pregnant with that seraph's fire,
Whose touch conceptual made aspire
Mine own from all the ages!
Wherefore I deem —
No individual ghost,
Moored on some drifting coast,
Yearning from out the dark for daylight lost,
For youth's wild torch
Wind-blown with joyous rages,
Hope's lifted latch and laughter in the porch, —
Not even now
For dear exchange of love's undying vow
With her that was the Aurora of my life,
My freed soul longs. For I, that lived, grew old
And died, am born again in beings manifold,
By grace of that which, once expressed,
Bequeathes to them the beautiful, the best,
That bloomed of me;
Whereby immortally

Their passions now partake
Of mine, of mine their raptures, their far wonder-quest.

So, in the spirits I pass through,
Still I create my own anew,
Broadened in scope; still I awake
Refreshed, in world-awakened eyes
Of all whom mine with thought imbue;
Still in my critics criticize;
Till, stretching the thralled spirit's cramp,
My art becomes an Arabian lamp
That, touched, — behold the genie rise!
Who bows his blazing form, and cries:
'Of all my Master's wealth — the true,
The beautiful, the strong, the wise, —
Mortal, what may his servant bring?'

Hist, Rabbi! — What bird's that? — I smell the spring.
Soft! — Could it be my silk-girl carolling?

Never alone,
Lover of joy,
Delicate scorner
Of death and his dances,
Whether you be
Girl or boy,

Rapturous mourner
Of life and her fancies,
Never may you, never alone,
Utter your ecstasy,
Make your moan.

Garland your hair:
Wind, come unwind it!
Hide away care:
Kind heart, come find it!

Winter, you gnome,
Shrunken and shrilly,
Shut Love in her tomb:
Tut! — willy, nilly,
Love through the loam
Unlocks with a lily!
Starlight or stone,
Nothing 's its own!

V

Fluent through all flows all, as the Greek saith:
The drowned stone ripples the starlight, even as death
The living waters
With widening discs of light. No sparrow falls
But gray-stoled choirs revive his matinals

With incense fresh of dawn. — You, Rabbi, friend,
Soul-fellow, busy with me to the end,
Crunching with poet-pestles and rhyme-mortars
Conundrums for the mind to apprehend,
Bear witness with me to this paradox:
What 's permanent must pass. All spirit-shocks,
Numbness and pain arise
Conceiving otherwise.
For Beauty is the flowing of the soul
Without impediment, the effect being joy;
So with a ripple may reveal her whole
Eternal ocean. But the child says: 'See!
My earth is stable; sun and stars spin wild.'
Not so the man: 'Our earth spins dizzily
Round the fixed sun.' The poet (man and child)
Peers in the sun, imagining he sees —
Beyond his face — the shadowy vortices,
Vast suctions and compulsions of the soul.
'Beyond the sun,' he sings, 'beyond — our goal
Is God!' Last pries the seer: 'Him whom so far
Ye seek, yourselves consider what you are
And find Him: stars aspiring *to be*,
Life from itself evolving soul — such He!
Time's runner, not Time's stake; Spring's sap, not sod;
Man's orbit, not his planet — such is God.

Vouch then, Ben Ezra, through the texts we glozed
Of earth's philosophies, I still opposed
The fixed, immutable. *To slake His thirst*,
You said, there lives our soul's utility —
His thirst unquenchable, for whom also she,
My silk-girl, sang: *There is no last nor first!*
Therefore through all
The chambers of His spirit, as I passed
In changing roles — to lift the dim tent-flap
(As David) and behold where hung huge Saul,
Supine,
Gigantic, serpentine,
From the cross-beam; or, through the black storm-gap,
Panting beneath a woman's hair
(As Sebald), to watch — now here, now there —
Blind lightnings stab the dark; thence to unfold
Before the quiet eyes of Cleon
His epos on its burning plates of gold;
Else watch, in Spring of another eon,
(Curled like the finger of an infant faun)
The prying crocus crimson through the lawn,
Idling, without other care,
In England, when my April 's there; —
Still it was mine, and *is*, in dreams
To search beyond the world that seems,

And flash before my fellow men,
Kindling His image to their ken,
Glimpses of that God-Man, who wills yet to *become*,
Ever for Whom,
In future as in past,
There is nor first nor last.

VI

But hark! Above our vault,
Rabbi, the footsteps halt;
The organ rolls the chant processionary.
Relinquish here this dust;
Accomplish there Time's trust;
Ascend with me beyond this centenary.

Go forth, for we are young!
Time's song is yet unsung;
Let our glad voices mingle with God's mass.
You, Rabbi, on my right,
Before us both — His light:
Through men's dear world, with Pippa, still I pass!

NINETY-SEVEN

A DECENNIAL GREETING

I

After the years, this hour : and after this — the years !
Fellows of Ninety-Seven,
Here 's to the hour that 's given
Out of the gladness of Time's gold arrears
For us, once more linking our several spheres,
To revel and remember. So let be
Our toast *Reunion* in our lifted glasses !
Yet of the wine each fellow passes
A glory shall escape his lip
To wake its magic counterpart
In the ten-years' vintage of his heart ;
For Thought is the master of revelry
Whose common ale of fellowship
Turns to Moselle in memory.

And now one thought which makes us what we are
Masters our hearts anew, where we are met
On the outer moats of youth,
And with strange ruth

Compels our vision, with a half-regret,
Toward those dear days and far
Of earliest manhood, ere, with souls elate,
We passed the ivied gate
To serve our elder liege, the State,
And paused, with tremulous faces turned, together,
Back to the Yard, as to our native heather:
Then plunged in the blind roar and tide of fate.

II

Put by the years — put by!
Let as it will the lamp
Of old Time lour:
After the years, this hour!
And after this, the years!
For hark! — above our gay night-camp,
Out of our common sky,
Blown from far bleachers by the winds of memory,
Hark now — the wild, boy cheers
That set us, lang syne, tingling by the ears:

Ninety-*Seven*, Ninety-*Seven*, from near and far,
Ninety-*Seven*, Ninety-*Seven*, to hail our star —
Harvard, Harvard!
Ninety-Seven, *Ninety*-Seven, here we are!

And once more the incense rises by the rush-lined banks
of Charles
On the frosty breath of thirty-thousand soul,
And the side-line watchers scramble as the skein of torses
snarls
And a shoulder glides from under — past the goal!
And a cataract of crimson pours its wave upon the turf
And heaves the sweating victors on its throng,
Where the bleachers rise like headlands from the roar of
living surf,
And the breakers of wild boys burst forth in song:

For it's *Glory, Glory to the Crimson!*
And hoarse echoes from Harvard's halls;
And the ivy overhead is glowing deeper red
In the twilight of her walls.

But four years are not Destiny,
And the ultimate June days pass
To hail the flower-ensanguined Tree
Where the hosts of Harvard mass,
And — banked like iris, sheath on sheath,
A-quiver with all their curls,
One mighty, rustling, maiden wreath —
Our coronal of girls!

Then it 's on with the fight of flowers,
And the battle of bouquets!
Till the mangled crush of the roses blush
In the smile of a maiden's praise.

Soft, then, that glance of smile and tress
Through murmurous evening glows:
The lace, the laugh, the loveliness,
The paper-lamps of rose,
Are portions of a pageantry
Made of the music's bars;
And now they are a memory,
A Class-day in the stars!

III

Watched from some clear and starry eminence,
How calm in plastic beauty dreams the world!
Mile after mile through moon-lit silences,
In fronded slumber furled,
Murmur the herded forests; and there is
No other sound or passion, but a sense
As if some stellar truce perpetual
Had healed all life with dews of harmony
And quietness; for all
The nestling foothills and the valleys lie —
Lapt in the summer moon's unconscious keep —
Like children, or like lovers, fast asleep.

Fond reverie and illusion! for beneath
That gloom-suspended canopy, the moan
Of the struck stag is stifled; blind, alone,
The wood-cat tears his flank; innumerable
Throughout the dark, seekers of life and death
Pursue their aimless ends of suffering
And brief satiety; claw, tusk and wing
Torture, waylay, destroy each other: even
The beak, whose morning-song ineffable
Shall ravish heaven,
Strikes at the adder with his own despite,
And all the pensive wonder of the night
Is stung with venom of a monstrous hive
Of hearts insatiable — to survive.

So 'neath the gaze of early manhood's eye
Repose the civilizations: derrick and spire,
Lighthouse and looming shaft and armoury —
Islanded grandly in the evening air —
Far-coiling trains spetting the gloom with fire,
And moving barges in the mist, and fair
Suspended bridges, lifting unaware
Beyond the fog-banks — build for one who dreams
Beautiful self-delusion: Fabulous
Must be the master-race of such a world!
Titan and angel in their stature, thus
To guide the lightnings that the gods have hurled.

— God! That this only seems
And *is* not! No, for us
Who fume and strive beneath the glamour, — we,
The cannibals of competition, see
What things we are: what beasts that hunt and flee
And kill, yet love the life we kill, and breed
The very progeny whose hearts we bleed.

What for? What need?
Are we, then, so in awe
Of our own pain, that we may not create
Out of our need the thing we thirst for — Joy?
Joy is not nature's law
But man's; and in the mind of man resides
For Joy's subservience —
The angel and the titan, Commonsense;
So if there still abides
In us the primal spark American
That kindled us in Liberty, a nation,
Let it leap up and burn a clearer flame,
As ever and the same
It still has leaped, since first that fire began,
At the cry: Emancipation!

IV

Fair is the field where Reason and High Will
Captain us, and their quickening battle-cry

Is *Justice, and the New Democracy!*
Justice, whose heart-red shield
Blazons this ultimatum on her field:
More Happiness
For all that live, and shall live, and not less.

The noble fustian of a former age,
Surviving still,
Has served its nobler ends; turn now the page!
All men are *not* born equal: *let* them be,
And let them be born better:
Equal in hope and opportunity,
Better in altruism and in will
To execute their clearer wisdom. Let
The loins of the begetter
Be passionate for his posterity
To breed a race more excellent, until
Our human species shall be perfected
Beyond the sway of passion, and forget
That ever time was when it might be said
(As men have said by San Francisco Bay):
Nature is not more cruel than mankind.

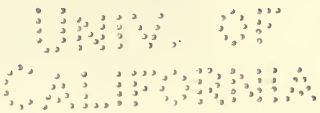
But this is still To-day,
Our day — not of rebellion or defined
Outburst, as when our law-schooled fathers broke

The transatlantic yoke,
Or Lincoln the slave's goad
Lifted, and struck the intolerable load
From Freedom's gallèd shoulders. Not to us
That outward menace: subtler slavery —
The inward canker of corruption, cant
Of predatorial wealth, insidious
Muffling of the bugle-voicèd press,
Hazard us none the less.
No more the trumpet's call and stallion's neigh
Incite us to the action: but instead
The ticker's steel tattoo, the teller's drone,
The trip-hammer's iron intermittent clang, the shrill
Steam-whistle, the huge-heaved and sullen moan
Of vast machines in vassalage — resound
Our call to carnage, where no blood is shed,
But where, from skyward cliffs and underground,
The living dead —
Whirled on the spokes of the enormous wheel
Of Commerce — chant their strident monotone.

V

Classmen of Ninety-Seven — Classmates still
In common conscience for the public weal!
Come forth, and let the quenching of world-sorrow
Kindle our joy! — Come forth, and make To-morrow

A new Commencement at the gates of Time
Whence all our deeds shall climb!
America, the matrix of the nations, lies
Fallow before us, and her destinies,
In nascent grandeur furled,
Are ours to shape in beauty for our kind.
Our manhood shines before, but when that shuts behind,
Still beckons — the young manhood of the world.



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